



Department of Veterans Affairs

# Diversity@Work

<http://www.diversity.va.gov>

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## Message from the DAS

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### Bookmarks:

**American Veterans Alliance**  
<http://www.wesupportvets.org>  
**The National Association of Black Military Women**  
<http://www.nabmw.com>  
**Women Veterans of America**  
<http://www.wvanational.org>  
**Women's Army Corps Veterans Association**  
<http://www.armywomen.org>

Do you have an EEO complaint?  
Contact the Office of Resolution  
Management at (888) 737-3361  
within 45 days of the alleged  
incident.

VA is proud to recognize the achievements of women in the workplace and in society during Women's History Month in March. Women have made remarkable strides in public and private sector service, and continue to expand their presence in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics fields. With nearly 60 percent women in our workforce, VA embodies the essential value of women in health care and public service.

On February 21, VA's Office of Diversity and Inclusion (ODI) met with Office of Personnel Management (OPM) officials in the second of its progress reviews on VA's Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Plan (DISP). VA's Administrations and Diversity Council (VADC) members reported on their organization's progress against the DISP strategic goals and objectives. OPM indicated that VA served as a leader in this area and model for other Federal agencies.

ODI will continue to report VA's progress towards attaining those goals outlined in our DISP (<http://www.diversity.va.gov/products/plan.aspx>) to OPM on a regular basis. For this reason, it will be essential that all VA components report their progress in the areas of diversity and inclusion to their respective VADC representative who will report this to ODI. To obtain a copy of the template for reporting and for more information about submission deadlines, contact Brenda Martin, ODI, at [Brenda.Martin@va.gov](mailto:Brenda.Martin@va.gov).  
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*Elizabeth Blackwell,  
first American woman to  
receive a medical degree*

## Commemorate

### Women's History Month

VA joins the Nation in observing Women's History Month this March, when we pause to recognize women's place in history, the present, and the future. This year's theme is "Women Inspiring Innovation Through Imagination: Celebrating Women in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics."

This theme refers to science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) career fields and according to the National Women's History Project (NWHF), "honors generations of women who throughout American history have used their intelligence, imagination, sense of wonder, and tenacity to make extraordinary contributions to the STEM fields." [Continued on page 6.](#)

# Message from the DAS

[Continued from the previous page.](#)

Finally, in addition to Women's History Month, we recognize Irish-American Heritage Month in March, Greek Independence Day on March 25, and Cesar Chavez Day on March 31. Read more about some of these observances beginning on [page 1](#). ~Georgia Coffey, VA Deputy Assistant Secretary for Diversity and Inclusion



Georgia Coffey

## Field Notes

### **Hispanic Employment Program Managers National Teleconference March 18**

The next Hispanic Employment Program Managers (HEPM) teleconference will be held Monday, March 18, from 3 to 4:30 p.m. (EST). The meeting will be held in the ODI Conference Room, 1575 I Street NW, Suite 200, Washington, DC, or participants may dial in at 1-800-767-1750 (access code 70087). This month's presentation is entitled, "Uncover Your Career Possibilities with MyCareer@VA!" This presentation will feature Kirsten Powers, a member of the MyCareer@VA team who facilitates program outreach and learning efforts, including the MyCareer@VA Super User program. Ms. Powers has been working on government and private sector human capital initiatives for over eight years. Most recently, she has supported training and career development projects at VA, the National Nuclear Security Administration, and the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency. For more information, contact Arlene Gonzalez, National HEPM, ODI, at [Arlene.Gonzalez2@va.gov](mailto:Arlene.Gonzalez2@va.gov).

### **2013 WRP Underway**

Have you considered hiring a student intern? The Workforce Recruitment Program (WRP) for College Students with Disabilities is an excellent recruitment and referral program coordinated annually by the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy and the U.S. Department of Defense.

WRP connects Federal employers with highly motivated postsecondary students eager to prove their abilities in the workplace through summer or permanent jobs. Annually, trained recruiters from WRP's Federal agency partners conduct personal interviews with more than 2,000 students with disabilities at college and university campuses across the Nation, and develop a database listing the qualifications of each student. Student applications are evaluated and those who receive a score indicating their employment readiness are referred for employment. Interns are responsible for their own transportation, employment relocation, and housing expenses.

As part of VA's continuing efforts to meet the Secretary's three percent goal for hiring individuals with targeted disabilities, ODI has established a centralized fund to minimize funding barriers that may prevent full utilization of the WRP during fiscal year 2013. To request funding reimbursement assistance for your temporary hire of ten weeks, please submit your application to ODI no later than Friday, March 15, 2013. Detailed instructions are available on VA's Disability Program Web site at <http://www.diversity.va.gov/programs/pwd.aspx#WRP>. The best candidates are hired quickly and usually go to the first agency to contact them.

Organizations interested in hiring a WRP student or recent graduate intern using their own funding can visit the WRP secure Web site at <http://www.wrp.gov> and request a password to access the intern database, to identify and hire a student or recent graduate intern. For recordkeeping purposes, please advise ODI of any WRP hires.

If you have any questions regarding the general WRP or WRP centralized fund, please contact Aurelia Waters, WRP Coordinator, ODI, at (202) 461-4124 or [Aurelia.Waters@va.gov](mailto:Aurelia.Waters@va.gov).

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# Field Notes

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## **Warriors to Workforce (W2W)**

VA's Office of Information & Technology (OIT) recently launched a program to help wounded Veterans develop skills and successfully transition from the battlefield into the IT workforce. The three-year holistic training program, called Warriors to Workforce (W2W), began January 28 in Frederick, Maryland, welcoming its first class of 22 selected Veterans. W2W participants have the opportunity to pursue a challenging new career path while earning a living for themselves and their families, all while supporting fellow Veterans. During this first year of the program, candidates will take 18 credit hours of business classes and 18 credit hours of IT-specific classes. Later in the program, candidates will fulfill challenging, 180-day assignments in OIT, gaining real-world, on-the-job experience right here at VA. When the program concludes, candidates will be placed into careers in the OIT workforce.

## **VA Resident First Female Muslim Endorsed by Islamic Society of North America**

Sherry Ra'ufa Tuell recently became the first female Muslim to be endorsed by the Islamic Society of North America—the largest umbrella organization for Muslims in North America and the only civilian Islamic endorsing organization recognized by VA. Ms. Tuell is a first-year Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) resident currently serving as a chaplain to palliative- and hospice-care patients at the Vancouver campus. She earned a three-year Certificate in Spiritual Counseling and Healing from the University of Sufism and Spiritual Healing in 2006. In 2010, Ms. Tuell received a Master of Arts in Islamic Studies and Christian-Muslim Relations and, in 2011, received a Graduate Certificate in Islamic Chaplaincy from Hartford Seminary in Connecticut. As a former journalist and writer, she authored a book on special issues in medicine and the hospitalization of Muslim patients.

## **Detail Opportunities Available at the White House Initiative for Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders**

On October 14, 2009, President Barack Obama signed the Executive Order reestablishing the White House Initiative for Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPIs). Co-chaired by U.S. Department of Education Secretary Arne Duncan and Assistant to the President Chris Lu, the Initiative is tasked to improve the quality of life and opportunities for AAPIs by facilitating increased access to and participation in Federal programs where they remain underserved. The Initiative works collaboratively with the Executive Office of the President, the President's Advisory Commission on AAPIs, and twenty-five designated Federal agencies to increase AAPI participation in programs in education, commerce, business, health, human services, housing, environment, arts, agriculture, labor and employment, transportation, justice, veterans affairs, and economic and community development. For more information about the Initiative, visit <http://www.whitehouse.gov/aapi>.

The Initiative offers a fast-paced work environment and a great deal of autonomy, so candidates who are self-starters, analytical thinkers, and strong writers are valued. Prior work experience with diverse communities is a plus but not required. The work location is 400 Maryland Avenue, SW, Washington, DC, and the duration of the assignment will be 6–12 months.

Please prepare a resume and a brief statement (less than 500 words) on why you are interested in detailing to the Initiative, and submit to Audrey Buehring at [Audrey.Buehring@ed.gov](mailto:Audrey.Buehring@ed.gov). Make sure to indicate the position for which you are applying:

- Advisor on Community Engagement (1 position available beginning March/April 2013; deadline for applying is March 15, 2013)
- Advisor on Communications (1 position available beginning June/July 2013; deadline for applying is March 31, 2013)
- Policy Advisor (1–4 positions available; applications accepted on a rolling basis). Continued on page 9.

# Training

## Section 508 Webinars

The VA Section 508 Program Office is currently offering a General Section 508 webinar. The webinar will be offered twice on March 28, from 10 am to noon and from 2 to 4 pm, and has its own TMS number for self-certification. Details for self-certification will be given at the end of the webinars.

The General Section 508 webinar provides an overview of the law and its application to Electronic Information Technology (EIT), including the technical, functional, and documentation/support standards surrounding conformance to Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act. VA employees attending the training session will learn more about VA's Section 508 Program Office and how it works to ensure that EIT products developed, procured, maintained, or used by VA are Section 508 conformant.

Both webinars are captioned. For more information, contact Vicki Leon, Section 508 Program Office, at

[Vicki.Leon@va.gov](mailto:Vicki.Leon@va.gov).

### Diversity News: An Online Training Resource

The March/April 2013 edition of *Diversity News* focuses on how VA supervisors can leverage MyCareer@VA.

*Diversity News* is available both on the internal VA Knowledge Network and on ODI's external Web site. To view current and past episodes, visit <http://www.diversity.va.gov/products/dn.aspx>.



## VSSC Online Training

ODI announces the availability of training on the Veterans Health Administration's Support Service Center (VSSC) Human Resources (HR) Reporting Tools. VA uses VSSC to store HR data for all of VA in an easy to use reporting format. This interactive training is designed to alert a wide range of managers, HR, equal employment opportunity (EEO) and diversity specialists to VSSC's HR query applications. All managers have a duty to ensure there is equal opportunity in the workplace with regard to hiring, promotions, and other terms and conditions of employment. This training provides guidance on how to properly use the applications to conduct various workforce analyses, identify triggers, and define and distinguish between Relevant Civilian Labor Force and Civilian

Labor Force. Training classes will be offered on the following dates from 10 am to noon (EST):

- Wednesday, April 17, 2013 ([https://www.tms.va.gov/learning/user/deeplink\\_redirect.jsp?linkId=REGISTRATION&scheduleID=2569352](https://www.tms.va.gov/learning/user/deeplink_redirect.jsp?linkId=REGISTRATION&scheduleID=2569352))
- Wednesday, June 19, 2013 ([https://www.tms.va.gov/learning/user/deeplink\\_redirect.jsp?linkId=REGISTRATION&scheduleID=2569353](https://www.tms.va.gov/learning/user/deeplink_redirect.jsp?linkId=REGISTRATION&scheduleID=2569353))
- Wednesday, August 21, 2013 ([https://www.tms.va.gov/learning/user/deeplink\\_redirect.jsp?linkId=REGISTRATION&scheduleID=2569354](https://www.tms.va.gov/learning/user/deeplink_redirect.jsp?linkId=REGISTRATION&scheduleID=2569354))
- Wednesday, September 18, 2013 ([https://www.tms.va.gov/learning/user/deeplink\\_redirect.jsp?linkId=REGISTRATION&scheduleID=2569357](https://www.tms.va.gov/learning/user/deeplink_redirect.jsp?linkId=REGISTRATION&scheduleID=2569357))

Each session will be conducted via Live Meeting. You can register using the relevant link above. Once you click on the link, you will need to sign into the VA Talent Management System (TMS) and click confirm. Spaces are available on first-come, first-serve basis. If none of these dates work for you, you can use TMS to request additional dates. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact Ryan Pugh at [Ryan.Pugh2@va.gov](mailto:Ryan.Pugh2@va.gov).

### MyCareer@VA Update

MyCareer@VA has new jobs, new functionality, and a new look!

VA's award-winning online career development resource now includes more than 450 jobs that employees can explore through an enhanced user interface to connect them to career possibilities through interactive resources.

The My Career Mapping Tool helps employees to chart a course along their current career path or explore a new one. Some of the new features allow employees to: find the learning and development they need to advance by using the VA Career Guides; explore work interests and environment preferences in the My Career Fit Tool and use it to find a job that's a perfect match; search job openings and view positions on an interactive map on the VA Job Finder as well as create a Federal resume that highlights skills on the My Federal Resume Builder.

To learn how to use this powerful career development program, register to participate in a live, interactive webinar by registering at <http://www.mycareeratva.va.gov/about/Pages/WhatsNew.aspx>.

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# Policy Alerts

## ***Appropriate Use of Time-Limited Appointments under 38 U.S.C. 7405(a)(1) for Medical Support Positions in Support of Research Projects, HRML No. 05-13-02***

This Human Resource Management Letter (HRML) provides additional guidance and clarification on the appropriate use of 38 U.S.C. 7405(a)(1) to appoint medical support personnel (other than trainees and students) on a temporary basis in support of research projects in the Veterans Health Administration. NOTE: This does not rescind or replace HRML 05-09-03.

This HRML expands the medical support authority by allowing temporary appointments at the grade GS-11 level and above for certain research positions. Temporary appointments under this authority may be made to positions at any properly classified grade level (e.g. no longer limited to positions below GS-11). The time limit of the appointment must be directly related to the life of the project. Initial full time appointments may be made for up to three (3) years provided that it is expected that funding for the project will continue for that period.

### ***Veterinary Medical Officer (Laboratory Animal Medicine), GS-701, Qualification Standard***

The revision to VA Handbook 5005, Part II, Appendix F32, which covers the revision to the Veterinary Medical Officer (Laboratory Animal Medicine), GS-701, qualification standard adds licensure as a basic requirement and incorporates qualification requirements at the GS-11 grade level.

### **USERRA**

The Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act of 1994 (USERRA, 38 U.S.C. §§ 4301 – 4335) is a Federal law intended to ensure that persons who serve or have served in the Armed Forces, Reserves, National Guard or other “uniformed services:” (1) are not disadvantaged in their civilian careers because of their service; (2) are promptly reemployed in their civilian jobs upon their return from duty; and (3) are not discriminated against in employment based on past, present, or future military service. The Federal government is to be a “model employer” under USERRA. See 38 U.S.C. § 4301.

A Veteran has the right to be reemployed in his/her civilian job if either leaves their civilian job to perform service in the uniformed service. See <http://vaforvets.va.gov/servicemembers/Documents/USERRA%20FAQs.pdf>.

VA recognizes that returning home safely is just the first step toward reintegrating with your family, work and life.

As a supervisor, you must adhere to these reemployment rights and ensure that you meet with the Veteran upon return and talk to him/her about how their job responsibilities will be transitioned back to them. You must also coordinate closely with the returning Veterans so that their transition back into civilian employment is as smooth as possible, including the reestablishment of their job, responsibilities, retraining and other considerations.

Remember, a returning Veteran, if re-employable under USERRA, must be restored to the job and benefits he/she would have attained if he/she had not been absent due to military service, or, in some cases, a comparable job.

The Department of Labor's Veterans' Employment and Training Service (VETS) supports Veterans, National Guard, and Reservists who may be activated for military service in many ways. For example, VETS has an online interactive computer program, the USERRA Advisor, which address the rights and responsibilities of individuals and their employers under the law. VETS can investigate potential USERRA violations, mitigate some service member concerns with their employer and provide guidance for Veterans on a myriad of topics. For more information about VETS, visit <http://www.dol.gov/vets>. For more information on the VA for Vets program including how to obtain professional coaching services, visit <http://vaforvets.va.gov>. **Continued on page 11.**

# Commemorate

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According to the United States (U.S.) Department of Commerce's Economics and Statistics Administration, in 2010, STEM employees were about 1 in 18 employees in the U.S. or 7.6 million employees. This number is projected to increase 17 percent by 2018. Today, VA employs many people in STEM occupations, including critical fields such as pharmacology, physiology, neuroscience physics, genetics physical science, nutrition science, cognitive science and biopsychology, biomedical engineering, biological engineering, computer and information systems, mathematics statistics, general engineering, mechanical engineering, and electrical engineering. These employees play a vital role in meeting the mission of the VA to care for Veterans and their families, and will continue to play an integral role the future needs of our Veterans.

During March, the NWHP honored women from different cultures and ethnicities known as visionaries and role models in STEM fields, including medicine, robotics, computer programming, atmospheric chemistry, architecture and primatology. Of these 18 women, a few stand out as leaders in VA-related work such as Elizabeth Blackwell who was the first fully accredited female doctor in the United States, Hattie Elizabeth Alexander who developed the first effective influenza remedies, Patricia Era Bath who helped in developing a probe that led to the development of advances in cataract surgery and conducted research that linked hormones to certain cancers, Grace Murray Hopper who wrote the first computer software and one of the first computer programming languages, and Flossie Wong-Staal who led in deciphering the HIV virus structure so that HIV tests could be developed. To see a complete list, please visit the NWHP Web site at <http://www.nwhp.org>.

Within VA, women in the STEM fields have made crucial discoveries, developed solutions to address the medical needs of Veterans, and have used innovation. VA honors all employees who continue their legacy of innovation and perseverance in all career fields.

In VA, as of September 30, 2012, women are 59.39 percent of the total VA workforce. Although VA has many women in our workforce, two ethnicity/national origin groups are still below their expected participation rate, based on the established benchmark, the Relevant Civilian Labor Force (RCLF). White women are at 75 percent of the RCLF and Hispanic women are at 81 percent of the RCLF. Additionally, although women of other national origin groups are employed in VA at rates that meet or exceed their rates in the RCLF, many of these groups, most notably African American/Black women, continue to have low participation rates starting at the GS 11 and Title 38 equivalent pay level and higher. ODI and other VA components have drawn attention to these variances and continue to develop methods to increase recruitment of Hispanic and White women through Management Directive 715 planning and other initiatives such as the Hispanic Employment Plan. Although women are represented in many of those critical STEM occupations, there is still a need to increase their representation in those fields, based on participation rates by job series compared to the CLF.

As the leader in providing care to women Veterans, VA, most notably VA's Center for Women Veterans, understands the impact women in the military have made in serving their Nation. According to VA's National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics, as of November 23, 2011, there were over 213,000 women serving on active duty, reserves, and National Guard, representing 14.6 percent of the overall military workforce. As of 2011, there were 1,853,690 women Veterans, representing about 8.3 percent of the overall Veteran population. Women's roles in the military until recently were limited to what some considered "gender appropriate" jobs or assignments. Today, the doors have been opened for women to serve in all fields, which also expands women's opportunities in the STEM fields, to include jobs like combat engineer, for example. These new changes help strengthen the role of women as equivalent contributors to our Nation's safety and security and heighten the importance of recognizing and honoring women who have sacrificed so much for our great Nation.

This month, as we celebrate Women's History Month, please take time to reflect on the many contributions of women on our Nation and society, including those in the STEM career fields. To learn more about VA's National Women's Employment Program, visit <http://www.diversity.va.gov/programs/women.aspx> or contact Nanese Loza, VA National Women's Employment Program Manager, ODI, at [Nanese.Loza@va.gov](mailto:Nanese.Loza@va.gov). Continued on page 8.

# Our Team: Your Resource

## *ODI's Training and Communications Team is Here to Help You With Your D&I Training Needs*

ODI's Training and Communications Team supports your initiatives for educating employees and managers on diversity and inclusion matters and fostering their competency in maintaining a fair, inclusive, high-performance, and healthy work environment. We also serve as diversity and inclusion advisors and consultants across organizational lines, and we assist your organization in promoting effective communication with employees and stakeholders on diversity and inclusion matters.

VA offers more than a dozen diversity and inclusion learning and development programs through the VA Learning University's Talent Management System. The Training and Communications Team understands that learning is not achieved in a single brief event. We work with you to enhance learning and development introduced through various opportunities provided by the Department. Our Team provides diversity and inclusion information in 15-minute Diversity News videos that can be used as learning podcasts. And, our Team offers custom diversity and inclusion learning and development opportunities through face-to-face, instructor-led classroom interactions that supplement e-learning experiences, and offers virtual support and learning programs delivered through video teleconferences, Live Meeting, and webinars.

To prepare VA executives, managers, supervisors, and employees to work more effectively in an increasingly diverse, multicultural business environment, our team encourages you to initially complete a learning needs analysis. Once the Training and Communications Team receives a training request (at least 30 days prior to the stated need), the team will analyze the request and determine how best to deliver a learning solution that meets your objectives. We also ensure that diversity and inclusion learning and development interventions meet your organization's and employees' needs in a cost effective way.

To meet the needs of your organization, ODI currently offers a range of learning content that may be customized. Topics include, for example:

- Accommodation
- Cross-Cultural Communications
- Cultural Competence
- Cultural Diversity and Difference
- EEO Compliance & Laws
- Generational or Gender Differences
- Inclusion or Inclusiveness
- Leadership & Accountability
- Power & Privilege
- Self-Awareness
- Stereotyping or Unconscious Bias
- Strategic Diversity Management

For more information about ODI's Training and Communications Team, visit <http://www.diversity.va.gov>. To schedule a face-to-face training session or obtain a learning needs analysis form, contact Brenda Martin at

[Brenda.Martin@va.gov](mailto:Brenda.Martin@va.gov). For more information about VA's diversity and inclusion training program, contact James Blockwood, Chief, Diversity Learning and Development, at [James.Blockwood@va.gov](mailto:James.Blockwood@va.gov); John Fuller, Ed.D, Chief Diversity Advisor and Nationwide Trainer, at [John.Fuller2@va.gov](mailto:John.Fuller2@va.gov); or Carolyn Williams, Diversity Training Specialist, at [Carolyn.Williams12@va.gov](mailto:Carolyn.Williams12@va.gov). For information about ODI's communications products, contact Yvonne Rannels, Communications Specialist, at [Yvonne.Rannels@va.gov](mailto:Yvonne.Rannels@va.gov). ~Carolyn Wong, Director for Training and Communications, ODI

## Training

[Continued from page 4.](#)

### ***Mandatory EEO, Diversity, Conflict Management, and ADR Training for Managers and Supervisors Updated***

Updated Talent Management System course 1328672—Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO), Diversity, Conflict Management and Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR)—is due to be released March 2013. Mandatory for VA managers and supervisors, this online course will provide the knowledge and tools necessary to meet legal obligations and supervisory responsibilities in the areas of EEO, reasonable accommodation, diversity and inclusion, conflict management, and ADR. This course must be completed by managers and supervisors by September 30, 2013, and every two years thereafter. For more information, contact Carolyn Williams, Diversity Training Specialist, ODI, at [Carolyn.Williams12@va.gov](mailto:Carolyn.Williams12@va.gov).

# Commemorate

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## References

Statistics on Women in the Military. The Women's Memorial. Retrieved February 5, 2013 from <http://www.womensmemorial.org/PDFs/StatsonWIM.pdf>.

U.S. Department of Commerce. Economics and Statistics Administration. STEM: Good Jobs Now and for the Future. Retrieved February 5, 2013 from [http://www.esa.doc.gov/sites/default/files/reports/documents/stemfinaljuly14\\_1.pdf](http://www.esa.doc.gov/sites/default/files/reports/documents/stemfinaljuly14_1.pdf).

Women Veterans Population Fact Sheet. VA Center for Women Veterans. Retrieved February 5, 2013 from <http://www.va.gov/WOMENVET/WomenVetPopFS1111.pdf>.

## Irish-American Heritage Month

VA joins the Nation this March in commemorating Irish-American Heritage Month. For centuries, America and Ireland have built a proud and enduring partnership cemented by mutual values and a common history. Generations of Irish have crossed the Atlantic in pursuit of prosperity, and today nearly 40 million of their proud descendants continue to make their indelible mark on the United States of America. Their stories, as varied as our Nation's people, humble us and inspire our children to reach for the opportunities dreamed about by our forebears.



Over hundreds of years, Irish men, women, and children left the homes of their ancestors, watching the coasts of Donegal and the cliffs of Dingle fade behind them. Boarding overcrowded ships and navigating dangerous seas, these resilient travelers looked to the horizon with hope in their hearts. Many left any valuables, land, or stability they had behind, but they came instead with the true treasures of their homeland—song and literature, humor and tradition, faith and family. And when they landed on our shores, they shared their gifts generously, adding immeasurable value to towns, cities, and communities throughout our Nation.

Today, we draw on the indomitable spirit of those Irish Americans whose strength helped build countless miles of canals and railroads; whose brogues echoed in mills, police stations, and fire halls across our country; and whose blood spilled to defend a Nation and a way of life they helped define. Defying famine, poverty, and discrimination, these sons and daughters of Erin demonstrated extraordinary strength and unshakable faith as they gave their all to help build an America worthy of the journey they and so many others have taken. During Irish-American Heritage Month, we recall their legacy of hard work and perseverance, and we carry forward that singular dedication to forging a more prosperous future for all Americans.

This article taken from the White House Presidential Proclamation—Irish-American Heritage Month, 2012: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2012/03/01/presidential-proclamation-irish-american-heritage-month-2012>.

# The Deaf and Hard of Hearing

## Improving Recruitment and Hiring

VA has made tremendous strides in hiring people with targeted disabilities in the past three years, yet has not hired many people who are deaf (one of the nine targeted disabilities). In fiscal year (FY) 2010, the last date for which the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission released information, VA's ratio of deaf employees of employees with targeted disabilities was 7.5 percent. In comparison, Health and Human Services' ratio was 15 percent and the Treasury Department was 17 percent. [Continued on page 10.](#)



# Field Notes

Continued from page 3.

## **Re-Issue of Rights and Responsibilities Posters/Brochures**

In January 2013, the Under Secretary for Health approved two updated documents that describe the basic rights and responsibilities of patients, residents and loved ones. Those documents are: Patient and CLC Resident Rights and Responsibilities and Rights and Responsibilities of Family Members. The Office of Patient-Centered Care & Cultural Transformation is working with the Office of Forms and Publications to print and distribute the documents for posting at facilities. Before the printed material is available, you may reference these documents at [http://www.ethics.va.gov/docs/policy/Pt\\_CLC\\_Rights\\_and\\_Responsibilities\\_20130207.pdf](http://www.ethics.va.gov/docs/policy/Pt_CLC_Rights_and_Responsibilities_20130207.pdf) (Patient and Community Living Center Resident) and [http://www.ethics.va.gov/docs/policy/Family\\_Rights\\_and\\_Responsibilities\\_20130207.pdf](http://www.ethics.va.gov/docs/policy/Family_Rights_and_Responsibilities_20130207.pdf) (Family Member) and post them to your local listservs and Web sites, as needed. Consistent with VA's commitment to patient-centered care and Joint Commission standards on non-discrimination, the updated documents now include a statement that Veterans and their family members will not be subject to discrimination for any reason, including for reasons of age, race, ethnicity, religion, culture, language, physical or mental disability, socioeconomic status, sex, sexual orientation, or gender identity or expression.

## **LULAC National Women's Conference**

The League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) National Women's Conference is taking place at Sheraton Puerto Rico Hotel and Casino, San Juan, Puerto Rico from April 12–14, 2013. The conference is designed to provide professional development workshops and seminars targeted to the needs of Latinas, and also highlight the contributions that Latinas have made to this country. This year's conference will feature workshops on Education, Health, Employment, Immigration, Civil Rights, Domestic Violence, Women in Business, Women in the Military, Nutrition, Face Base, and Youth and Young Adults. LULAC is the Nation's largest and oldest Hispanic Civil Rights organization. The mission of LULAC is to advance the economic condition, educational attainment, political influence, housing, health and civil rights of the Hispanic population of the United States. Over 600 participants are expected to attend the training. For additional information, please contact the LULAC National Fiscal Officer, Carolina Muñoz, at 1-866-577-0726 or by e-mail at [cmunoz@lulac.org](mailto:cmunoz@lulac.org), or visit <http://lulac.org/womensconference>.

## **Veterans, Enhance Your VA for Vets Profile**

Are you taking advantage of all the VA for Vets Career Center tools? Widen your job search through self-assessments. Taking a series of self-assessments generates a snapshot of your professional strengths. You can identify your levels of proficiency associated with common skills (like leadership or time management). A variety of tests evaluate:

- Actual work experience
- Current skills
- Work activities you enjoy
- Interests and work preferences
- Aptitudes and abilities

Armed with the results, you can highlight those strengths in your resume. Get started today in the VA for Vets Career Center. If you need assistance, call a VA for Vets career coach at 1-855-824-8387 (TTY: 1-855-824-8833).



The Veteran Employment Services Office (VESO) oversees VA for Vets, a comprehensive career management program that enables Veterans to successfully join the federal civilian workforce.

To learn more, visit <http://www.VAforVets.VA.gov>. Continued on page 12.

# The Deaf and Hard of Hearing

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Although the Justice Department had a lower ratio (9 percent) than most agencies because of the physical requirements for agencies in the Federal Bureau of Investigation, their ratio was still higher than VA's.

With the Secretary's goal that three percent of new hires be individuals with targeted disabilities, these numbers would be expected to increase, but they have not. While the first quarter of FY 2013 saw a 12.30 percent (positive) net change for employees with targeted disabilities, deaf employees saw a negative net change of -0.28 percent. It is understandable that VA does not have many deaf people in the medical (Title 38) positions, but even in the non-medical fields like Human Resources, VA has few deaf employees.

VA will be working to improve our recruitment and hires of people who are deaf. Communication is no longer the barrier that it was, thanks to enhanced communication access through voice carryover phones, CapTel, videophones, video relay services, real-time captioning systems (including FaceTime, Skype, etc.), secure web health portals permitting providers and patients to communicate via texts and emails, and telemedicine through Web-based cameras and videophones. The rapid development of "apps" for smart phones and iPads also has had a tremendous positive influence on access for deaf and hard of hearing individuals. The Department of Defense's Computer/Electronics Accommodations Program provides some equipment at no cost. Also, assistive technology purchased as an accommodation for an employee with a disability can be reimbursed via the Centralized Fund administered by ODI.

While it is not hard to find deaf and hard of hearing people who are qualified for Title 5 (Administrative) positions, it can be more difficult to find deaf and hard of hearing people who are qualified for the medical (Title 38) positions. It will be easier to do so in the future, as a new task force is working to identify ways that deaf and hard of hearing people can obtain the required education and skills for clinical jobs in the health care field.

The partnering institutions that are advocating for deaf and hard of hearing people in the health care field are Gallaudet University, the National Technical Institute for the Deaf (part of Rochester Institute of Technology), the University of Rochester Medical Center, and the Rochester General Health System. Their main goal is to ensure that the health care career "pipeline" for deaf and hard of hearing individuals facilitates entry to educational and job opportunities. Their recently released report finds that there are deaf and hard of hearing people in the private sector who are Audiologists, Dentists, Nurse Clinicians, Nurse Practitioners, Pharmacists, Physicians, Psychologists, Radiologists, Registered Nurses, and Surgeons.

The numbers of deaf and hard of hearing people who have obtained medical degrees and health care related jobs are currently small. However, due to the commitment of some deaf and hard of hearing people, support systems, and continuous advancement in technology more and more deaf and hard of hearing people are experiencing successful and rewarding careers in health care. For example, one physician was identified as profoundly deaf when he was one year old. He earned his MD and is now a pediatrician. He reports that his job is interesting, stimulating, and gratifying, and that he has never experienced a negative reaction from a patient because he is deaf.

Thus, it appears that eventually, VA will be able to hire deaf and hard of hearing people for our medical positions. For now, VA will be focusing on the Title 5 positions. People with targeted disabilities, including deafness, can be hired via the Schedule A excepted appointment authority. The Veterans Health Administration's (VHA's) Diversity and Inclusion Office (D&IO) will contact the task force to set up a dialogue concerning prospective deaf and hard of hearing graduates with degrees in health. With our in depth understanding and funding for disability accommodations, the VA is in a good position to support the hiring of deaf and hard of hearing people in the medical career field. David Rabb, Director, VHA D&IO, believes that "one of the ways to enhance and capitalize on innovation is to integrate diversity of ideas, abilities, and passions of all people. The potential to hire deaf and hard of hearing people in Title 38 and Title 38 Hybrid positions will ensure that the VA remains a world class health organization across the health care continuum of the 21st Century."

# Policy Alerts

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## **Transgender Care Directive**

On February 8, 2013, the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) released VHA Directive 2013-003. This Directive establishes policy regarding the respectful delivery of health care to transgender and intersex Veterans who are enrolled in the VA health care system or are otherwise eligible for VA care.

VA provides health care for transgender patients, including those who present at various points on their transition from one gender to the next. This applies to all Veterans who are enrolled in VA's health care system or are otherwise eligible for VA care, including those who have had sex reassignment surgery outside of VHA, those who might be considering such surgical intervention, and those who do not wish to undergo sex reassignment surgery but self-identify as transgender. Intersex individuals may or may not have interest in changing gender or in acting in ways that are discordant with their assigned gender.

VA does not provide sex reassignment surgery or plastic reconstructive surgery for strictly cosmetic purposes.

The Office of Patient Care Services is responsible for the contents of this Directive. Questions related to medical care may be referred to Specialty Care Services at (202) 461-7120. Questions related to mental health care may be referred to the Office of Mental Health Services at (202) 461-7310. VHA Directive 2011-024, Providing Health Care for Transgender and Intersex Veterans, is rescinded.

## **VA JOAs on USAJOBS**

VA Job Opportunity Announcements (JOAs) posted on USAJOBS must be free from errors and must adhere to Office of Personnel Management (OPM) regulatory requirements. The VA USA Staffing Program Office (VAUSASPO) has been tasked with conducting daily reviews of VA JOAs posted on the USAJOBS for quality, accuracy, adherence to Hiring Reform requirements, and use of current VA JOA templates that are available at the VA USA Staffing Information Center. Although the VAUSASPO has been conducting daily JOA reviews, catching and correcting errors before the JOA is viewable online is the key to avoiding applicants from receiving inappropriate and inaccurate information about VA jobs. It is also a time-consuming task to have human resources (HR) offices remove and re-post corrected JOAs. Therefore, it is imperative that HR officers and senior HR specialists conduct comprehensive reviews of the JOAs before they are posted on the USAJOBS Web site. To assist HR Professionals in creating quality and accurate JOAs, the VAUSASPO has developed tips for the Most Common JOA Errors, located in the Help file of the VA USAS User Community of Practice (CoP). The VAUSASPO will continue to conduct daily JOA reviews, but the information provided in this article should help prevent errors from being made and should reduce the number of serious errors found during our internal review. Additionally, when a member of the VAUSASPO contacts your office regarding a JOA that has an error you are asked to be responsive and understanding to the nature of their call. VAUSASPO's goals are to help you and to ensure VA is compliant with regulatory requirements. An error in a JOA could result in a person being hired erroneously and later requiring a corrective action to be taken which could end in having to remove an employee from the rolls. Lastly, to assist in reporting accurate data for VA's Speed of Hire, please become familiar with and ensure you are completing all data fields and are using the definitions provided in the HRML 05-12-05: Required Data Field Definitions for Reporting in USA Staffing. For additional assistance with posting JOAs, please refer to the JOA Tips, CoP JOAs, JOA Templates, and the VA USAS Desk Guide of the CoP Reference Folder. For inquiries related to USA Staffing or USAJOBS, please contact the VAUSASPO at [vausastaffing@va.gov](mailto:vausastaffing@va.gov) or Judy Naquin, Supervisor, VA USA Staffing Program Office, at (202) 461-6316.

## **Regularizing Erroneous Title 5 Appointments**

VA Handbook 5005, Part I is being amended to provide procedures for regularizing erroneous Title 5 appointments and submitting related staffing variation requests. [Continued on the next page.](#)

# Field Notes

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## **March is National Professional Social Work Month**

More than 10,600 master's-level social workers serve as licensed independent practitioners in VA's health care system. The mission of VA Social Work is to maximize health and well-being through the use of psychosocial interventions for Veterans, families and caregivers. These services include assessment, crisis intervention, high-risk screening, discharge planning, case management, advocacy, education, supportive counseling, psychotherapy, resource referrals, and resource acquisition. Social work services are a key component in the continuum of clinical services provided to Veterans in VA facilities. Social workers have training and expertise in specialty areas of Mental Health, such as PTSD and substance use, and provide advanced levels of clinical practice and specialized case management services to Veterans. They serve as key members of interdisciplinary treatment teams and respect the distinctive role and expertise of each member of the health care team, ensuring the best possible care for our Veterans. Social workers also frequently coordinate existing programs or develop new programs to meet the needs of Veterans and their family members/Caregivers. To learn more about VA social workers, visit <http://www.va.gov/socialwork>.

# Policy Alerts

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## **Employment of Persons with Disabilities**

VA Handbook 5005 is being amended to:

- Consolidate excepted appointment authorities for persons with disabilities into one appointing authority under 5 CFR 213.3102(u);
- Clarify that persons with disabilities on Schedule A appointments receive concurrent consideration with competitive service employees under merit promotion procedures for advancement opportunities; and,
- Identify Selective Placement Coordinators as professional resources.

## **Selective Service Waivers**

The Selective Service Act requires that all male U.S. citizens and other males residing in the U.S. born after December 31, 1959, register with the Selective Service System between the ages of 18 and 26, unless they are exempt from registration. Selective Service Act allows denying a Federal benefit, i.e., employment, that an individual may otherwise receive if he cannot demonstrate that his failure to register was not knowing and not willful; therefore, individuals who failed to register within the prescribed period are not eligible to obtain or continue VA employment, except under the following conditions:

- a. The applicant/employee provides documentation from SSS, such as a Status Information letter (SIL) which shows that he is exempt from the SSS registration requirement and
- b. The applicant/employee requests an official decision and the adjudicating authority finds that his failure to register was not willful and intentional.

All initial requests (for both Title 5 and Title 38 appointments) for an official decision regarding the failure of an applicant/employee to register must be forwarded to the Director, Recruitment and Placement Policy Service (RPPS) (059), Office of Human Resources Management (OHRM), VA Central Office, Washington, DC 20420. Prior to forwarding the request, please review the HR policy and procedures that can be found in VA Handbook 5005, Part II, Appendix R to ensure you cover all of the necessary requirements. Questions regarding the procedures for submitting requests for Title 5 appointments should be directed to [vatitle5staffingpoli@va.gov](mailto:vatitle5staffingpoli@va.gov). Questions regarding the procedures for submitting requests for Title 38 appointments should be directed to [vatitle38staffingpol@va.gov](mailto:vatitle38staffingpol@va.gov).



# Compliance Corner

## Undue Delay in Offering a Reasonable Accommodation



The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission requires an employer to respond expeditiously to a request for reasonable accommodation. If the VA allows undue delays in offering a reasonable accommodation, a violation of the Rehabilitation Act or the Americans with Disabilities Act may result. The EEOC will look at the following factors in determining whether an undue delay has occurred: (1) the reason for the delay; (2) the length of the delay; (3) how much the individual with a disability and the employer contributed to the delay; (4) what the employer was doing during the delay; and (5) whether the required accommodation was simple or complex to provide.

So how long is too long? In a 2006 decision, the Commission found a six month delay by the Department of Homeland Security in providing an accommodation violated the Rehabilitation Act where the agency provided no reason to explain the delay, and there was no indication that the employee had contributed to the delay. In a more recent decision involving a VA employee, discrimination was found when a Nurse Manager's request for a reasonable accommodation was delayed for eight months.

The complainant had a congenital hearing disability that was permanent and irreversible. On August 10, 2011, she requested captioning for a mandatory training course that she was scheduled to attend a week later. She also requested captioning for mandatory training she was scheduled to attend in October 2011. The complainant specifically requested that Communication Access Real Time (CART) be provided if captioning was not available. CART transforms spoken words into written text. A CART transcriber types what is being spoken into a steno machine. The text is then transcribed instantaneously through a computer and displayed on a screen in real time.

CART services were not provided to the complainant for the August 16, 2011 mandatory training. In following up on her initial reasonable accommodation request, she told management officials that she could not hear the other participants, and because they were sitting at round tables, she could not see their faces. She again reiterated her request for CART services for future mandatory meetings.

When she attended mandatory training in October 2011, the CART program was again not provided. She testified that "several of the class exercises were also listening to CDs which was useless for me. Even with an Auditory Listening Device, I could not understand what the speaker was saying".

The evidence of record established that Complainant continued to notify management about her need for CART services, but that it took eight months for those services to be provided. Management acknowledged that the complainant did not receive the necessary accommodation to understand the mandatory training programs. When a management official was asked whether he believed that the VA's policies were properly followed, he testified that "the accommodation was not provided, so I don't think that's in line with the policy". ~Maxanne R. Witkin, Director, VA's Office of Employment Discrimination Complaint Adjudication

Resource: All VA managers and supervisors are encouraged to consult with their Local Reasonable Accommodation Coordinator when an employee asks for a change and mentions a disability or injury as the reason for the request. Cost is not a factor in deciding whether to provide the accommodation because ODI has a Centralized Fund to reimburse the cost of equipment not obtained from the Computer/Electronic Accommodations Program or the cost of any services provided as an accommodation. For additional information, please visit <http://www.diversity.va.gov/programs/pwd.aspx#fund>.

## Diversity Council Activity

### Meeting Minutes Available Online

The next VA Diversity Council (VADC) meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, April 17, 2013. For information on the VADC, including meeting agendas and minutes, the roster, and a copy of the charter, visit <http://www.diversity.va.gov/council>.

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## OTHER USEFUL LINKS

HR&A  
[http://www.va.gov/  
ofcadmin](http://www.va.gov/ofcadmin)

VA's Office of Human  
Resources Management  
<http://www.va.gov/ohrm>

VA's Office of Resolution  
Management  
<http://www.va.gov/orm>

Veterans Health  
Administration's Diversity and  
Inclusion Community of  
Practice  
[Michael.Youngblood@  
va.gov](mailto:Michael.Youngblood@va.gov)

## GOT NEWS?

We want to hear from you! If  
you'd like to share your story  
ideas, comments, or  
suggestions, e-mail us at  
[odi@va.gov](mailto:odi@va.gov).

# D&I Online

The mission of the Department of Veterans Affairs' diversity and inclusion program is to develop and implement a comprehensive, integrated, and strategic focus on diversity and inclusion as key components of the Department's human resources strategies. Here's a sampling of online tools available at <http://www.diversity.va.gov> that can help leverage diversity and build inclusion:

- ▶ Women's History Month and other observance resources.
- ▶ Training resources, guides, and reports.
- ▶ Links to professional and community organizations.
- ▶ Best practices for diversity management.



## D&I In Your E-mail Inbox

Once a week, ODI sends out *NewsLink*, an e-mail message with annotated links to current news items and other information related to leveraging diversity and building inclusion. For a FREE subscription to this weekly electronic news service, e-mail [odi@va.gov](mailto:odi@va.gov) with the words SUBSCRIBE NEWSLINK in the subject line. Find a sample of *NewsLink* at <http://www.diversity.va.gov/products/newslink.aspx>.

## D&I on Your TV or PC

*Diversity News* is a monthly video program co-produced by ODI and the VA Central Office Broadcast Center for you. *Diversity News* follows VA News on the VA Knowledge Network, Content Distribution Network, channel 2. Programs are also available at <http://www.diversity.va.gov/products/dn.aspx>.

## Calendar

<http://www.diversity.va.gov/calendar>

### March

Women's History Month  
Irish American Heritage Month  
National Professional Social Work Month  
National Multiple Sclerosis Education and Awareness Month

DeafNation Expo  
March 2; Tampa, FL  
March 16; Austin, TX  
March 23; Phoenix, AZ  
<http://www.deafnation.com>

Casimir Pulaski Day  
March 4

Telework Week  
March 4-8

National Council of La Raza 2013 NCLR  
Capital Awards  
March 5; Washington, DC  
<http://www.nclr.org>

International Women's Day  
March 8

Deaf History Month  
March 13-April 15

St. Patrick's Day  
March 17

Palm Sunday  
March 24

Greek Independence Day  
March 25

Holi  
March 27

Good Friday  
March 29

Easter  
March 31

Cesar Chavez Day  
March 31